

Bob and Wyvetta, a love story

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Bob was a simple man. As his name implied, he was the same backward as he was forward. But when he looked at Wyvetta, with her beautiful clear green eye and her broad smile that showed off all her own teeth, he felt like he could be more. He felt that with her by his side, maybe, just maybe, he could be a Robert.

Bob was the town handyman. He could talk electrical circuits and carburetors with the guys at the shop for hours. If someone wanted to know what wood to use for a chicken house or how to unclog a toilet, Bob was the man. He whittled toys for orphan children every Christmas and specialized in discussing the weather and home remedies with the ladies of the Coal Valley Historical Society. He could repair practically anything, except his voice when he wanted asking Wyvetta out. Every time he tried, all his words caught together like a hairball in this throat.

And he did try. He went to The Mercantile where she worked every Wednesday and waited until the shadows on the dirt road stretched to about 3 p.m. That was the sweet spot in time. The women of town were home mixin' up the supper biscuits so they'd have time to rise before dinner and the factory whistle had another two hours before it sounded to let everyone else out. It was the time the store was most likely to be empty.

He'd shuffle in dust puffing from his rubber boots, wire cutters and screwdrivers hanging from his belt and quickly locate himself behind the stacks of greeting cards. He'd spend

20 minutes or so pretending to read the different salutations while working out in his head clever ways to get her to notice him.

Every now and then he'd take a peek at the front where she invariably sat on the stool by the register, her good eye following the script of the latest movie magazine. Sometimes she'd lick her thumb to add friction when she turned the page. The sight of her pink tongue popping in and out gave him the shivers.

He'd work up his nerve to ask her out, but then fumble when the time came for the actual words to come. Instead, he'd bring a card up as an excuse to talk to her for a minute. "It's my mom's birthday. Think she'd like this one?"

"It's a kitten wearing a birthday hat. Who wouldn't like that?"

In fact, he'd bought so many cards over the last year, she started calling him Cob, short for Card Bob. Those little witty moments warmed his heart more than the cards he used mostly as kindling in his wood stove.

This day, though, things were different. As he stood in the back a new man wearing a shiny black suit and a yellow bowtie came in and went straight to Wyvetta. Opening a worn brown suitcase, he started talking.

"Hey pretty lady. I'm Andre Beauchemin. I'm your new sewing and notions salesman with Ferman Company." His voice was as smooth as a river pebble.

Bob had never heard a name as fancy as Andre Beauchemin before. He snuck a look from behind the rack and saw the man kiss a knuckle dimple on the top of Wyvetta's hand. As

Bob watched, Wyvetta actually giggled a little. The fur ball in his throat dropped into his stomach and unwound into barbed wire.

“What happened to Mr. Beagle?” Wyvetta was never one to just accept someone at his word.

“Why he up and had a heart attack. Fell over dead outside the Tinkerville Five and Dime,” the man said, making sure to put his hand over his heart as he spoke. “Terrible. Terrible. But don’t you worry. I’m going to take care of you.”

Bob watched as Andre Beauchemin held out a silky dark green ribbon to Wyvetta.

“This looks like it should belong to you.”

She let him set it on the counter next to her orange soda pop.

“Beagle wasn’t supposed to come until Friday. I haven’t finished my inventory,” she said, hands on her ample hips.

“Well, don’t you worry about a thing little lady. How bout I leave you a couple of samples and I’ll stop back on Friday?” He took her right hand in both of his. “I’m sure we’ll have a wonderful working relationship.” His voice was as slick as butter on hot corn and twice as damaging to Bob’s heart. Wyvetta watched the man walk from the store, her hand still outstretched where Andre Beauchemin had left it when he let go.

This was trouble. Bob had thought he had time to work everything out, but no, it looked like there was a shiny new suit wearing rooster in his hen house. He stepped backward from the

card rack in despair and caught the edge of the adjacent twirling display of paperback novels. It crashed to the floor, with Bob on top like he was trying to mount it.

Maybe she hadn't noticed, he thought hopelessly. As he thrashed about trying quickly jump to his feet, his screwdriver got jumbled in the wire holder. He was trapped like a rabbit in a snare with Wyvetta lumbering toward him.

"Bob, what the heck did you do?"

He struggled but it only made the tangle tighter. He prayed for a stroke, the Rapture, to be transported by aliens, anything to get him out of this mess. But Bob was not a lucky man.

And then she was there, lifting him and the book rack up at the same time. My God she was strong. A true woman of substance, he thought, as he felt the ripple of muscle in her arms.

He stood mute and immobile as she untangled his tools from the rack. Her hands were so close to his waist, he worried the heat from his face might catch his hair on fire.

"You Ok?"

Was that concern or pity in her voice? He couldn't seem to bring his eyes higher than her steel toed boots to see. Instead, he just nodded the tiniest bit, muttered, "Thanks," and followed the floorboards to the front door. He could barely turn the knob to leave he was shaking so hard.

Out on the street, he put his hand to his heart, wishing for a Mr. Beagle style attack, when he touched something inside his overalls, a rectangular lump. What the heck? He pulled

The card had a picture of a knight on a white horse, lance in hand, looking from a cliff down over a castle in the distance. "Faint heart never won fair lady," Bob read.

He'd never seen this card before. It was a sign from God. Bob had to do something big to win Wyvetta's surely enlarged heart. Holding the card high in the air, he hurried off.

The next day Wyvetta MacKenzie was seated on her regular stool at the front of The Mercantile and thought about Bob Duffy.

He was a catch. She'd just never figured out the way to grab him.

She wore a shiny green ribbon in her thick red hair. It matched the green plaid in her sleeveless flannel shirt. Bob always made a comment on days she wore an ensemble.

"Mighty fancy dungarees for a weekday," he'd said last week when she wore jeans she'd bedazzled with heart and star beads. He'd smoothed his wavy hair in that sweet way he did. She remembered how a single curl fell onto his forehead, all Clark Kent style, she thought. His hands were so adorably small. His fingernails were never black underneath. A man with good hand hygiene was hard to find in this area. Plus, he always looked into her good eye. He never followed the other one on its wanderings like other people, like that fast-talking salesman who ruined her weekly visit with Bob. She got queasy just thinking about him.

She was distressed about the incident the day before. She'd acted impulsively when she saw Bob on the floor. She shouldn't have picked him up. Mama always said she needed to act